

REMARKS

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejected Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. 103 as being unpatentable over the prior art. In particular, Claims 1-4, 6-10, 12-16 and 18 were rejected as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent 5,315,504 (Lemble) in view of U.S. Patent 6,7121,921 (Altman); and Claims 5, 11 and 17 were rejected as being unpatentable over Lemble in view of Altman and further in view of U.S. patent application publication no. 2002/0007324 (Centner, et al.). Also, the Examiner withdrew Claim 19 from consideration in this application as being directed to a constructively non-elected invention.

Applicants are herewith filing a Request for Continued Examination (RCE) to continue the prosecution of this application.

This Amendment is being submitted to amend independent Claims 1, 7 and 13 to better define the subject matters of these claims. New Claim 20, which is dependent from Claim 1, is being added to describe a feature of the disclosed embodiment of the invention. In addition, Applicants respectfully traverse the decision of the Examiner to withdraw Claim 19 from consideration in this application.

With respect to Claim 19, the Examiner, in the Office Action, argued that Claim 19 is directed to an invention that is independent or distinct from the invention originally claimed, and that the previously filed Claims 1-18 and Claim 19 are related as subcombinations disclosed as usable together. The Examiner further argued that restriction between Claims 1-18 and Claim 19 was proper, and that Applicants have constructively elected Claims 1-18. The Examiner thus withdrew Claim 19 from consideration.

Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's argument because Claim 19 is dependent from Claim 1. Thus, Claim 19 incorporates by reference all of Claim 1, and because of this, Claim 19 is not a subcombination of Claim 1. Claims 1 and 19 are not distinct from each other for purposes of a Restriction Requirement. This is because whenever the invention of Claim 19 is practiced, the invention of Claim 1 necessarily is also being practiced. This, in turn, is because Claim 19 is expressly dependent from Claim 1.

Accordingly, Restriction between Claims 1-18 and Claim 19 is not appropriate, and the Examiner is respectfully asked to reconsider and to withdraw that Restriction Requirement and to cancel the decision to withdraw Claim 19 from consideration in this application.

Moreover, all of Claims 1-20 patentably distinguish over the prior art because the prior art does not disclose or suggest the feature of changing the names on the list of approvers to account for delegation of approval authority, as described in independent Claims 1, 7 and 13.

To elaborate, the present invention provides a unique approval process in an electronic requisitioning system. As discussed in the present application, with computer and computer networks becoming commonplace, businesses are beginning to use electronic requisition systems more and more. One basic aspect of many requisition systems is the approval, usually internal of the business, of a proposal for a requisition.

Present electronic requisition systems offer important advantages, but they also have limitations. One significant limitation is that there may be lengthy delays before all the approvals are obtained, especially if one or more of the approvers are not available for several days or longer.

The instant invention may be used to reduce or eliminate these delays. Generally, this is done by providing an electronic requisitioning system including an electronic list of approvers that is recalculated to take into account the availability of the approvers, and, in particular, by recalculating that list to account for delegation of approval authority.

With the preferred embodiment of the invention, an electronic requisition form is prepared including a proposal for a requisition. This proposal requires approval by each of a plurality of approvers. An electronic list is established of the approvers for the proposal; and at defined time, this list is electronically recalculated to change the names of the approvers on the list.

For example, if one approver needs to be absent for a period of time, that approver may delegate his or her approval authority to another person. With the present invention, the list of approvers is recalculated to take into account this delegation of approval authority. As a result, the approval process does not have to wait to be completed until the absent approver returns.

The prior art does not disclose or suggest updating the list of approvers to take into account this delegation of authority.

Lemble, for instance, describes a document approval system in which electronic facilities are used to review and approve documents. In this system an approval path is computed, and displays are shown to a user to inform the user of, for example, the name of the previous approver.

As the Examiner has recognized, there are a number of important differences between the present invention and the method and system disclosed in Lemble. In order to address these deficiencies of Lemble as a reference, the Examiner relied on Altman.

Altman discloses a method and system for generating workflow messages based on adding annotations to a file repository or database. The annotations are stored separately in a searchable annotation repository, and in this way, the original documents can be preserved unchanged while still providing the ability to comment on the original document. Also, the system keeps track of who has reviewed the documents.

The Examiner, in the Office Action, cited Altman for the disclosure of changing the names of the approvers on the list, and the Examiner specifically cited the Abstract and column 8, lines 6-18 of Altman for this disclosure. Applicants respectfully submit, though, that Altman does not change the list of approvers. Altman disclose removing names, not changing names.

Removing a name from the list once that person has given approval, as is done in Altman, does not mean that this person is no longer an approver – it simply means that his or her approval has been given. The present invention is different. When the name of an approver is changed from the name of one person to the name of another person, that former person is no longer an approver – that authority has been given to the latter person.

In addition, Altman does not disclose or suggest changing the names of the approvers to account for delegation of the approval authority.

Independent Claims 1, 7 and 13, as presented herewith, describe this feature of the present invention. In particular, each of these claims describes the feature that the list of approvers is recalculated, at defined times, to change the names of the approvers on the list to account for delegation of approval authority by said approvers to other persons.

This feature of the present invention is of significant utility because it facilitates that delegation of authority. This, in turn, helps to avoid or reduce delays in case one of the initial approvers is absent for a while. With the instant invention, that absence does not need to delay the requisition approval process.

The other references of record have been reviewed, and these other references, whether considered individually or in combination, also do not disclose or suggest this feature of this invention.

For instance, Centner, et al. discloses a Web-based server that facilitates communications and commercial transactions between buyers and suppliers. In the disclosed procedure, a buyer initiates a request for quotation or a request for proposal, and a group of possible suppliers are notified of that request. These suppliers can bid on the request, and one supplier may be selected to provide the requested products or services.

The procedure described in Centner, et al. has several special features. For instance, the bidding process may be conducted in various ways, and the bidding suppliers may be notified of each other's bids. An electronic database of preferred suppliers may be maintained, and much of the communications between the buyers and possible suppliers is done electronically.

Thus, Centner, et al. is directed to communications between buyers and sellers, while the present invention is directed to the process for approving a proposal for a requisition. In addition, Centner, et al. does not disclose or suggest recalculating any list of approvers, at defined times, to change the names of the approvers on the list.

Because of the above-discussed differences between Claims 1, 7 and 13 and the prior art, and because of the advantages associated with those differences, Claims 1, 7 and 13 patentably distinguish over the prior art and are allowable. Claims 2-6, 19 and 20 are dependent from Claim 1 and are allowable therewith, and Claims 8-12 are dependent from Claim 7 and are allowable therewith. Similarly, Claims 14-18 are dependent from, and are allowable with, Claim 13. The Examiner is thus also requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. 103, and to allow Claims 1-20.

For the reasons set forth above, the Examiner is asked to reconsider and to withdraw the decision to withdraw Claim 19 from consideration in this application. The Examiner is also requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejections of Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. 103, and to allow these claims and Claims 19 and 20. If the Examiner believes that a telephone conference with Applicants' Attorneys would be advantageous to the disposition of this case, the Examiner is asked to telephone the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

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